

some of the party may have brought their instruments along to enliven the proceedings, sitting down inside the Trianon to play [so that they could not be seen from the outside] and perhaps performing on old instruments, which would account for the music sounding 'faint'. Dr Parrott has taken immense pains, not so much to identify the exact piece of music heard, as to determine its period and possible composer; but whether this was Monsigny, Grétry or Philidor seems immaterial so long as the fragment jotted down by Miss Jourdain is recognisably of the period. It is open to doubt whether even this can be established, despite all the author's painstaking detective work; but after all, the object of his investigation, to quote his own words, is to prove that whatever the passage recorded may have been, it was 'the written recollection of hallucinatory fragments . . . of music never consciously heard before by Miss Jourdain.'

It may have been, but I doubt whether it will ever be possible to prove it.

ROLLO MYERS

SPIRITUALISM: A CRITICAL SURVEY. By Simeon Edmunds.
Aquarian Press, London, 1966. 204 pp. 30s.

The lazy investigator will find this book an excellent index containing, as it does, references to most of the personalities and prominent 'cases' concerned with Spiritualism or psychical research during the past eighty or more years up to the present day. It would seem to be a mine of information, rather like the old Bradshaw railway guide, were it not that the reader may find himself occasionally stranded.

Mr Edmunds presents himself in the character of an authoritative and dispassionate investigator. He works with commendable zeal, is certainly an assiduous reader, gifted with a fluent—occasionally imaginative—pen, but his more discerning reader may well be suspicious that he is not quite so unbiased as would appear. Time and time again incidents and names are cited, with the accent, obvious or hinted at, on fraud. Very little in the whole book would lead the new enquirer to think that the worthy fathers in the past could have done anything but investigate chicanery. Why continue to spend so much time and money in the abortive search for the pearl of great price which would seem to be but a chimera?

But Spiritualism has not been so barren as Mr Edmunds would lead us to think. Much that he tells of its mode of presentation and treatment is unfortunately true, but it is Mr Edmunds' loss

that he has not been able to gain more practical knowledge himself—rather than through reading—with such exponents as Mrs Osborne Leonard, Mrs Eileen Garrett, and Mrs Ruth Vaughan in the field of mental mediumship, and Frau Maria Silbert and Evan Powell in the physical field.

On page 125 the author says: 'Most people tend in a given situation to "see" what they expect to see: this tendency is strongly reinforced when there is a motivation, conscious or unconscious, to find support for a particular point of view.' How true this is; but it would seem that he, himself, is not altogether innocent of these tendencies; he gives the impression that he has sought instances of nonsense or fraud to the almost total exclusion of records of possibly veridical phenomena, and when he presents alleged evidence of fraud he is liable to exaggerate it enormously.

Thus, on page 75 Mr Edmunds states, 'For some years prior to this the only physical seances at the College were those given by a fraudulent medium named William Olsen, who was detected, out of the chair in which he was supposed to be tied, by Lucian Landau and myself after he had given a number of sittings at the CPS.' Again, on page 115 the author states: 'At a sitting at the College of Psychic Science, London, in 1959, Lucian Landau and I were able to establish conclusively that Olsen freed himself from the ties holding him to his chair, thus enabling him to wave trumpets, ring bells, speak in the "direct voice", produce butter muslin ectoplasm, "levitate" objects, etc. and then retie himself before the lights went on at the end of the seance.'

The dénouement to which the author refers came about thus: at the conclusion of the seance Mr Edmunds examined the rope ties on the medium; he proclaimed himself quite satisfied that all was well, as sitters present on that occasion can testify. Only subsequently did he state that the rope was loose—he did not say 'untied'. He was asked why he did not report this at the proper time, when questioned in front of the circle, and he replied 'I didn't like to!' No mention was made then of Olsen being detected out of his chair and mere looseness of the rope would not have shown that Olsen had escaped from it rather than simply strained against it. Either Mr Edmunds is exaggerating the incident in question, or else at the time of the sitting he withheld vital information from his fellow investigators who were given no opportunity to check for themselves. In neither case is one's confidence in his reporting increased.

It may, however, be that Mr Edmunds has something else in mind when he claims to have detected Olsen out of his chair.

Before the seance, a small spot of luminous paint had been placed on the panel of the medium's chair, behind his back, about shoulder height. Two of the sitters were advised of this, and placed in positions to be able to detect the spot should the chair be empty. These observers reported that, despite careful watch, at no moment during the sitting had the spot been seen. Mr Edmunds and Mr Landau may have detected this spot although neither of the other observers could do so. But even if this was the case it was by no means equivalent to detecting Olsen 'out of the chair in which he was supposed to be tied.' Mr. Edmunds seems to be putting the case against Olsen rather more strongly than the facts warrant; supposition or suspicion cannot be interpreted as conclusive evidence.

Mr Edmunds is also prone, here and there, to *author's licence*, which can be detected by anyone who knows the relevant details. A little exaggeration is harmless enough, no doubt, but can the uninformed reader discriminate, and rely on other statements being free of similar inflation or diminution? Sir George Joy, in his excellent foreword, credits the author with the intention of presenting the facts objectively and dispassionately, but can the reader have the same confidence?

The quotations throughout the book amount to slightly more than 44 pages, or practically a quarter of the volume, excluding the appendices, which themselves are quotations, and this saves the average reader searching for himself. Nevertheless, it would be better for every student to read what went before, and what followed, some of the incidents recorded.

Mr Edmunds touches on many aspects, including the religious, the healing, hypnosis, and what he calls non-spiritualistic paranormal phenomena, and the blurb on the jacket mentions the investigation and experiments undertaken by the author. May it be hoped, therefore, that his next book will not contain so much reference to other people's accomplishments, faults or mistakes, but give some details of his own experiments, how, when and where they took place, and, most particularly, the why and wherefore of the verdicts.

Meanwhile, this present very interesting volume may serve as a useful digest of the established Societies, mediums, researchers and their works, past and present, and some of the literature of the subject; but the serious student would be well advised to map his own travels in this labyrinthine country of Spiritualism rather than expect it may all be apprehended in a comfortable armchair journey through Mr Edmunds' terrain.

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